Approved for Release: 2017/11/28 C06629260

SENIOR EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF
4 March 2003
PASS SEIB 03-051CHX

Iraq: Challenges To Cultivating Democracy [redacted] (b)(3)

Longstanding political norms and limited exposure to representative government will slow progress toward democracy in a postwar Iraq. Two decades of Saddam's brutality have added to the difficulties by stripping away elements of civil society that have nurtured democratic development in other countries.

-- ***However, factors such as public expectations of a more open political process and the Kurds' recent experience with self-rule could provide a basis to build on.*** [redacted] (b)(3)

Iraqis have never freely chosen a leader or experienced modern participatory mass politics. Iraq's most promising experiment with electoral politics took place during the 38 years after its independence from the Ottoman Empire, when free elections in urban areas gave the educated male elite limited political participation under the monarchy.

-- Since 1958, Iraq has been ruled by a series of dictators, and the Ba'th Party transformed the country into a repressive, one-party state soon after its 1968 revolution. [redacted] (b)(3)

The Ba'th Party in the 1970s significantly improved health, education, and economic development, creating a large middle class and inadvertently laying socioeconomic foundations that could have supported a democratic evolution. Saddam's military adventurism and UN sanctions reversed these gains, throwing the middle class and the country more generally into a devastating socioeconomic decline.

-- Iraq in 1978 had one of the highest real GDPs per capita in the region at $10,300; by 2001, it had fallen to $2,500. [redacted] (b)(3)

The strong tribal, ethnic, and sectarian loyalties of Iraqis are likely to be major barriers to political party development and may encourage voting by identity group, as they have among the Kurds during their quasi-independence.

-- Iraqi political culture also is dominated by patron-client relationships and by ready recourse to violence to resolve differences. Saddam's state apparatus has become the ultimate patron, reinforcing a pattern of dependency that inhibits the personal initiative on which democratic politics depends. [redacted] (b)(3)

Nevertheless, several elements in recent Iraqi experience could foster democracy. Key among these is the apparent widespread rejection of any form of repressive, authoritarian rule after Saddam's demise. [redacted] (b)(1)
[redacted] suggests the vast majority of Iraqis would welcome Saddam's removal and

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